A Snare For The Eye

A classical anecdote in the history of art which has come to us from ancient Greek is the often told story of Parrhasius and Zeuxis. These two painters challenged each other which one of them could make a painting that would most deceive the viewer. Zeuxis showed his painting of grapes that seemed so real that the birds tried to pick them. Then Parrhasius showed a painting of a curtain, but Zeuxis, so full of his own success, called out that the other should finally take the curtain away to show his painting. Once he noticed his mistake, he awarded Parrhasius the prize, acknowledging that he had not just fooled the birds, but him, a painter himself. A modern version of this parable of realism would be that of the film apparatus, producing machine vision by projecting 24 frames a second, the minimum speed for the eye to perceive continuous movement that appears natural to it. Any slower, and the artificiality of the image, the mechanism ensnaring the eye, would become apparent.

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The original Latin connotation of the word perception is 'catching', or 'taking captive'. Though the impossibilities of such possessiveness and its relation to presence implied here have become clear in modern times, it still resonates. Visual art works embody specific perceptual strategies directed to catch the eye of the beholder, (mis)leading him to take certain viewpoints and perspectives that come into effect within their given cultural and historical contexts. I would propose to think of the art object as a performative event, shaping vision in the moment of being envisioned. Marcel Duchamp posed against the distanced modernist spectator the implicit look of the regardeur: the regardeur is the observer who activates the artwork in the act of looking. His *Etant Donner* would be part of my imaginary exhibition. In this work the field of vision is related to an embodied eye, forcing the observer to recognize within his act of looking the voyeuristic dimension, the unavoidable accomplice in what is being watched.

Sincere forms of trickery have always been essential to art already long before Duchamp. They are extremely valuable in rendering different views of reality, throwing the eye back onto itself. Especially now our lives in the city have become lives in a picture book, catching our eye in the streets and in our homes, awareness of how our field of vision is packaged to draw us in has become crucial. This exhibition focuses on works that explicitly bring the act of looking into play by making visible the ambiguity of perception itself. They play a game with the gaze of the spectator, thereby putting their own mechanisms on the spot, as perception of the trap is always a moment of self-reflection.

A Snare for the Eye means the eye is ensnaring the thing that traps it. The first question to arise is how to behave in the trap. If we get caught in a trap, we inevitably have to concern ourselves with the conditions of the trap, or simply enjoy to be snared...

Andreas Slominski

What does it mean for us, the spectator, to observe a sculpture that is also a trap, that is not just a trap but also a sculpture? For over 15 years Andreas Slominski has collected, constructed and assembled traps and other catching mechanisms. He has exploited the trap's unlimited range of shapes such as steles, funnels, cubes and cylinders and its sculptural potential expressed in its extensive vocabulary of layering, strewing, screening, the standing, hanging or lying of elements, and its use of widely divergent materials. His sculptures are fully functional traps, every detail in the construction made to outwit the prey it is directed at. Transferred from their original context to the context of art, the traps with their functional aesthetic are only metaphorically in pursuit of their prey. By means of mimesis and practical devices, traps play a game with tricks and trickery, linking a symbolic beauty inextricable to their dangerous truth. Slominski's trap sculptures take the shape of all sorts of everyday objects like churches, socks, chairs, cans, camouflaging the traps to deceive the targeted prey. Camouflage is paradoxically designed to be discovered, to lure and deceive the victim, for only then the prey will fall into the trap. Set in an art context it is the art framework which camouflages the traps as sculptures, thus the only prey that might be addressed is the art itself and its trappings. These panoptical traps after all are cat and mouse games in only ambiguous meanings.

Diederik Klomberg

In working with the specific characteristics with which the eye operates upon certain materials, colours and shapes, Klomberg extends the possibilities of the visual field. In his work perceptual illusions are created not with the intention to reveal something else, but to show themselves as such. Being a play between a situation and the workings of eyesight, illusions are phenomenon on basis of which an unusual view of reality can be rendered. In *De Vorm van Niets* (The Shape of Nothing) (2003), shape is given to empty space, attempting to make nothingness visible. Doors and windows are defined by what is cut out of a building, and it is exactly in what is not there, in the negative spaces, that we find the use of a building. In one of the exhibition spaces the artist creates a vertical and horizontal line structure describing the entire interior space. The threads differ in thickness and colour and do not circumscribe a form but only areas where the eye can move freely. The result is an architecture of weightlessness in which mass and space, left and right, up and down are balanced out against each other. It is impossible for the viewer to perceive the nature and structure of this immaterial construction in a singular way. Making it difficult for the viewer to focus his or her gaze, the eye is constantly directed towards the spaces in between the lines. Nearness and farness become interchangeable sensations, physical movement becomes optical movement.

Carolien Stikker

T.V. Blues (2003) consists of twenty photographs taken of a television set that is turned on while connected to a video player. The blue screen that appears is being photographed from various distances. Stikker is interested in what this technology does when it is not functioning for its intended purpose. As in all of her work she focuses on those moments and areas that are commonly not thought of as important or functional. While television's intent purpose is to transmit continuous flows of information, *TV Blues* shows this same apparatus in a more meditative state, as antithesis to the visual overload it usually produces. This creation of a meditative aesthetic field of what is otherwise a busy audio-visual site could be thought of in terms of the technological sublime. In the same vein one can think for example of Stikker's photographs of magazine advertisements, of which details are blown up to create an abstracted image that is reminiscent of paintings of Rothko or Newman. At a moment that photography is being displaced by digital imagery as the dominant mode of perception, Stikker is investigating the limits of the photographic as an indexical trace, an imprint of reality, by photographing that what is out there but not really seen, producing as it were the unconscious of technology: television's aura.

Gert Rietveld

In his work Gert Rietveld plays with our perception and orientation of space. He tries to overcome spatial restrictions by constructing spaces and optical devices through which we can experience our surroundings and our position within it differently. In *Untitled* (2003) a cabin equipped with a seat inside and a telescope on its roof is positioned a few meters from a wall on which a mirror is hanging. Looking at the mirror from inside the cabin, the exterior view including the cabin appears upside down. The observer however sees him or herself positioned right side up within this topsy turvy world. Another work, titled *Pan (1800°)* (1990) consists of 72 photographs that together display the movement of a camera that turns around five times in a room. If you scroll down through a given sequence of photos it seems to be a consistent space. However, comparing two photographs that are not immediately following each other one slowly discovers inconsistencies in the construction of the space. As with the first work, the artist confuses our sense of fore-and background, illusion and construction, perception and expectation.

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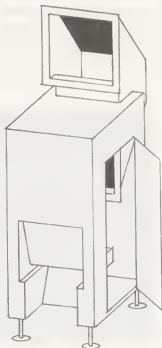
Claude Wampler

Painting, The Movie (2000-2001), originally consisting of a live installation and three objects, is based on a single shot from Akira Kurosawa's film *Throne of Blood*, which itself is a retelling of Macbeth. Shown in this exhibition is *Act 1: painting 1 (ear), painting 2 (ankle), painting 3 (wig)*. Referring to these objects as paintings reveals an essential aspect of Wampler's work, always merging theatre, film and painting within a shared field of conditions, emphasizing the theatricality of the object and the objectness of the performing body. The sculptures, theatrical gory body parts, are boxed into small LCD vitrines and equipped with motion sensors detecting the proximity of the public. They are wired in such a way that they are visible from a distance but become opaque as soon as the viewer approaches to scrutinize them from up close. The glass becomes transparent again as soon as one moves away from them. In *Painting, the Movie* technology controls one's access to art providing the viewers with an unexpected experience. These objects perform their own visibility, exercising the option not to show themselves. There is a constant dramatic tension between the soothing monochromatic minimalism of the opaque state of the objects and the clear state revealing the content of the vitrines. As we move away they blink back to life again, only to become carnage filled vitrines. These are art objects that can transcend their own vulnerability to the viewer's gaze. With the effect more intriguing then the objects themselves, the real subject of these sculptures seems to be our desire to apprehend them, expressed through the voyeuristic longings that are propelled by this inverted peepshow, simultaneously frustrating and intensifying the viewers' desire to see.

Gert Robijns

Robijns work dwells somewhere between the visible and the invisible, between here and there, between now and then. Often he projects images on objects that interact with them, so that recording and presentation coincide onto the same plane, as for example in the work printed below, *Attend* (2001), where the projected image of a guard entered and left an actual basement. Similarly, for this exhibition a work will be created within the exhibition space itself: the video will be shot in the constructed setting where it will be presented. As a result I can only describe at this moment what as an idea might become, but not necessarily will completely overlap with the final work. For *Conditions* (2003) people will be filmed against a wall occasionally warming themselves in front of a grate through which hot air blows. This video will then be projected onto the same wall, so the projected figures will be seen interacting with the real object of the grate and the real sensation of hot air, in a space that is kept noticeably cold. Sometimes the figures will fade away and an exterior will be invoked by projecting a background of a snow landscape shot from a driving vehicle. The multiple associations given to the observer enables him to relate what is being looked at to what is being felt, while to see and feel the exterior from the interior might cause a sense of displacement. Robijns scrutinizes here the frontier between reality and illusion, in pursuit to grasp what always escapes, the impermanence of simple sensations.

Thomas Zummer

In his work Thomas Zummer examines the way in which media technologies such as photography, film, copying and digitization have come to restructure perception in the reproduction of everything we look at. His drawings carry titles such as *Drawing of a Manipulated Printout of Digital Capture of an Interpolated Video Frame/Cherry Blossoms*. They simultaneously invoke the memory of the picture subject, and the memory traces of the multiple transfers between the different media presentations of the subject. We transfer film to video, analog video signal to digital, moving data-stream to still image, email these images from computer to computer, make prints and photo copies. Zummer's drawings focus on the imprecision of current media technologies as they endlessly circulate bits of pieces of reality, increasingly producing the loss of the referent. At every stage in the transfer from one image to the other, there is both an evacuation of data and an accretion of noise. And with the real reference of the image at so many representational removes, what becomes visible is this resulting noise, till what is left seems merely a product of the imagination, a shadow of an image of an image. Crucial here is that Zummer expresses his media commentaries in drawings, without aid of any optical device. Traces of the negative contours of the ordinarily suppressed patterns of technical reproducibility are rendered outside of the chain of mediations. Reflecting this in drawing paradoxically enables him both to awaken an, perhaps nostalgic, attachment to the object through its residual traces, while regaining a critically detachment from the anonymity and inclusiveness of the media machine. Through drawing, as the most direct imprint of consciousness, Zummer positions himself as an archaeologist digging into the layers of our contemporary mediascape.
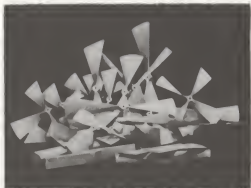
Nicola Pellegrini

Nicola Pellegrini's work is an exploration of the context and possibilities of vision. His narratives, photographs and installations are an attempt to observe the occurrence of vision itself. *SopravVivere a casa nostra* (Surviving at home) originated in 1999 while working as a location manager for a soap opera, which would become the source of a series of related works. For this particular piece Pellegrini took around 60 slides of different homes, shot in such a way that the television is always in the centre of the picture, and always the same size. The television is playing continuously while the domestic interior it is set in fades into ever different ones. Instead of the television images being zapped, here it is the home apparatus it is set in that is being zapped. The work speaks of a shared televised reality, confusing fiction and reality as the world inside the telly, in continuous time flow, seems more real than the world outside of it. The observer in his turn watches people in shifting environments watching television, doubling the situation viewed onto his own act and space of watching.

Renata Czajor

Concerta da Camera (Concert of the Camera) (1995) is the title given to a short composition performed by a few instrumentalists in a domestic surrounding. The video work that is shown here is a reconstruction of this event which took place one night in a studio in Poland. The composition is based on two rows of light tubes on the ceiling and the possibility to switch them on and off independently of each other. When the lights are switched on they not only produce a ray of light but also a clicking sound, while switching them off not only causes darkness but also silence. While recording, the camera was on auto focus, sometimes making the images sharp, other times rendering them out-of-focus, blurring the image resulting in a shower of light and colours. The camera eye simulates the eye of the viewer, who is responding to film as if the play of light and shadow were the tracings of human presence. Here it is the mechanical eye that watches the flickering of light and dark on the rhythmic clicking sound, a blinking and clicking producing, recording and projecting light and shadows: the concert of the camera.

Elke Lehman

Elke Lehman has installed a number of simulated surveillance cameras in the
entrance, corridor and exhibition spaces. Visibly non-functional, these sculptures titled
Portraits (2002) are playfully constructed from a variety of materials -plexiglas,
cardboard, shopping bags, wax, mirrors- each of them being a unique 'portrait' of the
standard device commonly found in public spaces. The personalized nature of these
sculptural objects is in marked contrast to the industrial high-tech appearance of typical
surveillance equipment. These blind camera eyes put attention to themselves instead,
questioning the anonymity and omnipresence of modern surveillance. At the same time
they humorously diffuse the sense of discomfort and anxiety one can experience in
public space, caused by the possibility of being caught unaware by the multiple
watching devices.